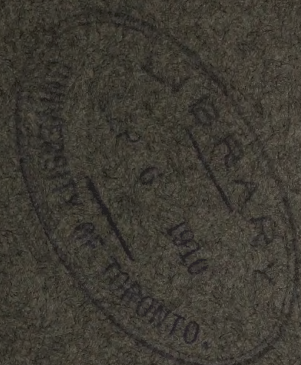


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ATLANTIS.

C. H. BEWLEY.

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THE
NEWDIGATE PRIZE POEM
1910

BY
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SCHOLAR OF NEW COLLEGE

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MCMX.

Does not the wind wail
In the city of gems?
Does not the prow sail
Over fallen diadems?

ATLANTIS.

WHERE western billows rise and fall,
And sea-winds moan and sea-birds call,
And gallant ships pass to and fro
With sails full-bellying, long ago
There stood a city, fair and strong,
Whose streets were riotous with song,
Where the sun shone continually.

Far from the roaring of the sea
It rose from out a meadowy plain.
What mortal eye shall see again
The shining beauty of its towers,
Set in that land of grass and flowers,
Of rolling hill and shadowy spring?
And wise men whispered wondering
That no man's hand had piled the stone,
But God had made it for His own.

Girt by a river's branching flood,
Upon a rocky isle it stood,
With palace and with citadel,
Wherein that country's lords might dwell
And rule the people of the land:
High turrets rose on every hand,
Whose walls were kindled into flame
By many a glowing stone, whose name
Has perished in the years between:
And from the streets went up the sheen
Of gold, and chrysoprase, and brass,
The hues of many-tinted glass,
And sardonyx, and chrysolite:
The sun itself was not more bright
Than that fair city, at whose birth
Beauty was manifest on earth.

Without the walls, the plain unrolled
Its green luxuriance, fold on fold,
With glades and streams innumerable:
For in that country no rain fell,
Nor any tempest raged in it;
But at all times the air was sweet
With perfumes that the sun sucked out
From the ripe earth. Yet never a drought

Could parch the soil; for, clear and cool,
Through rippling channel and still pool,
There flowed from earth's all quickening veins
Water, that fosters and sustains
The secret life of all green things.

Around the hidden watersprings
Green branches spread a murmuring shade
With flowers inwoven, that had strayed
Surely from other worlds than ours:
For scarce more fragrant are the flowers
That shine before angelic eyes
On the far plains of Paradise.

No season saw the branches bare,
But leaf and fruit and blossom were
Mingled together on the tree:
In never-ending harmony
The hum of bees and song of birds
Gave praise beyond all human words
To that high power, which set apart
One lonely region where the heart
Might rest from trouble for a while.

And they, the dwellers in the isle,

How can I tell of them? They knew
None of the sorrows that subdue
The purest of our joys, and press
Hardly upon our happiness,
Nor earth's old, sad satiety:
But, careless as the bird or bee,
Seized the bright moments as they passed,
And, as if each had been the last,
Set heart and soul to gather up
Each drop of joy out of the cup
That yet grew never emptier;
For what mischance could come to stir
The tranquil sunlight, or to bring
An end to all their mirthmaking?

So dwelt they through unnumbered years:
No surge of human hopes and fears
Could trouble them, who knew no hope
Unbounded by the engirdling slope
Of guardian seas, who cast no eye
To the dim continents that lie
Enshrouded in a mist of grief:
And after joy past all belief,
Ere time had touched their ageless shore,
The waters gathered and closed o'er

City and plain, and hid away
 The people that had laughed a day
 And now were come to their life's span.

Who knows the ways of God to man?
 It may be that with wanton pride
 Their hearts were filled, and they defied
 The gods themselves to do them wrong:
 It may be, justice tarried long,
 Passing the fatal moment by,
 And when at length the hour drew nigh
 That none may flee, no lighter doom
 Sufficed than ocean's living tomb:
 Or maybe 'twas no sin they wrought,
 But in their ease they took no thought
 Beyond the splendour of those hours,
 And, drunken with the scent of flowers,
 Forgot that 'tis but for a space
 This world is man's abiding-place,
 Where God has kindled his soul's spark
 For a short hour 'twixt dark and dark.

Now 'tis a story of the old days:
 Since laughter filled those silent ways
 Innumerable years are dead;

And wave and wind pass o'er their head
Who knew no force of wind or wave:
Deep waters are an endless grave
For those who had no thought of death;
No charm nor spell can give them breath,
Nor quicken the dead limbs again
That for so long a time have lain,
Reckless of song and revelry,
In the still kingdom of the sea.

Yet somewhere now the city lies,
Far hidden from the glancing skies:
The wandering stream of ocean flows
About its long, unvexed repose;
And citadel and turret stand
And sentinel a sunken land.

Around its walls of gold and brass
The water glimmers, green as glass;
And sardonyx and chrysolite
Are covered from earth's garish light
By many a fathom, faint and dim:
Through hall and palace fishes swim,
And press their chilly scales upon
The pillars built of glittering stone.

II

Where rose the sound of dance and song,
Great monsters lie in speechless throng:
The distant strife of wind and sea
Comes faint to them for minstrelsy:
And strange sea-growths and coral creep
About that cold, eternal sleep.

Old is the story I have told,
And who may know if, being old,
These things were as the wise men say?
Had they, in truth, a brighter day
And fairer skies than ours? On them
Did the gods set a diadem
Of beauty that the years have lost?
Were those calm meadows never tossed
By tempest, or those hearts by fear?
Was the glad season of the year
Immortal as the joy that sprung
In souls unalterably young?

It may be 'tis an empty tale;
And eyes were dim, and cheeks were pale,
And voices sad in the old time:
It may be never was a clime
Where the sun shone without a cloud,

And never a heart beat but was bowed
Under the load of human woe.
With all our knowledge we but know
The things that lie before our feet;
And, because life is partly sweet
And ever girt about with pain,
We take the sweetness, and are fain
To set it free from grief's alloy:
And this, the sum of all our joy,
We place, a halo, round the head
Of folk we know not, who are dead.

So, from a grey and gloomy land,
We seek the home our hearts have planned:
Bemused, with dream-bewildered eyes,
We search for those star-litten skies
And joyous valleys, where have birth
All sights and sounds too fair for earth.

We toil from weary age to age,
With sorrow for our heritage,
And no joy is continuous,
But weariness is close on us
To taint our mirth ere it is fled:
What wonder that our hearts are led

To build beyond the sighing seas
 A sacred city of their ease,
 To circle it with rainbow hues
 Of love and of delight, to choose
 A space out of the long ago,
 And give it all life's joy we know,
 And give its folk a full content,
 Who were, as we are, tossed and rent
 By grief and passion, looking back,
 Like us, along time's endless track
 To some blest isle, that shines afar
 In fancy's kingdom, like a star?

Yet I have thought the gods bestow
 A greater gift than we can know
 At certain times at their own will:
 There is a dower more precious still
 Than all the fabled joys of old,
 To which all wealth of gems and gold
 Is but as dust upon the wind.
 We seek and seek, but may not find
 A fitting name to tell its worth:
 For vanished utterly from earth
 Is that which holds man's heart in thrall,
 The end and the desire of all.

Had they, in truth, that happiness
Whose very name we can but guess,
Which we behold but as a dream,
The vision of a sleep, a gleam
Fainter than the first flush of dawn,
A bird's bright feathers, swiftly gone,
A flower that withers at our gaze,
Music a fairy piper plays
To lure us from a dreary world?

A myriad ages time has hurled
Into the chasm of the past,
But yet one memory shall outlast
The wreck and ruin of the years:
No gathering surge of human tears
Can quite blot out the beacon-fire
That tells us of our soul's desire,
Or cover wholly from our sight
The sunlit shores of lost delight.

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